

Chapter 10

Agriculture and Open Space

Agriculture and Quality of Life

Agriculture is an important part of Delta's history, community character and quality of life. Figure 10 – 1 shows parcels in agricultural land use, including prime agricultural parcels, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's database. It may be important to distinguish between prime and non-prime agricultural parcels when designating areas for potential future growth. Given the preferences of the Delta community, it may be appropriate to avoid residential subdivisions or any other non-agricultural development on these prime parcels.

The Steering committee acknowledges the history and value of agriculture in Delta County. As the economics surrounding agriculture continue to change, the committee recognizes that the small farm parcels currently within the city of Delta may not remain as viable farmland. Although these parcels may be developed, the general agricultural atmosphere that still exists will continue at some new levels in areas within the county. It will be difficult to limit the development of ag lands within the City as the demand for that land for higher value use may eliminate all ag lands in the City by the year 2030.

The Black Canyon Land Trust (BCLT) has protected just over 32,000 acres in Montrose, Delta, Ouray and Gunnison counties. (See Figure 10-2). They also worked with the Northern San Juan Initiative to conserve parcels of property in San Miguel County that are contiguous with BCLT- conserved properties.

The BCLT (<http://www.blackcanyonlandtrust.org/index.htm>) projects include ranches, farms, river corridors and valuable view sheds. The largest conservation parcel the group has contracted with is 3,700 acres in Delta County and all the properties they have worked with have varied size and use. Federal and state tax deductions are allowed for donation of conservation easements.

The Agricultural Economy

Although agriculture provides much of the pastoral quality of the landscape, agriculture represents a very small part of Delta County's economy.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture 2002 Census of Agriculture (latest information available), there were 1,063 farms in Delta County and the average farm size was 247 acres. The fairly large average size is skewed by the small number of very large farms. The size distribution by size category indicates that about two-thirds of the farms are less than 50 acres, which is typical for farms in the Delta area. Forage land (alfalfa, hay) occupies approximately 24,775 acres, followed by 2,887 in corn for grain and 1,404 acres of corn for silage. Livestock also continues to be a

strong element in Delta County’s agricultural economy. Sweet corn production has increased with the advent of “Olathe Sweet Corn.”

2002 Census of Agriculture County Profile

Delta, Colorado

Number of farms

1,063 farms in 2002, 1,100 farms in 1997, down 3 percent.

Land in farms

262,443 acres in 2002, 265,593 acres in 1997, down 1 percent.

Average size of farm

247 acres in 2002, 241 acres in 1997, up 2 percent.

Market Value of Production

\$39,077,000 in 2002, \$38,312,000 in 1997, up 2 percent.

Crop sales accounted for \$14,413,000 of the total value in 2002.

Livestock sales accounted for \$24,664,000 of the total value in 2002.

Market Value of Production, average per farm

\$36,761 in 2002, \$34,829 in 1997, up 6 percent.

Government Payments

\$847,000 in 2002, \$392,000 in 1997, up 116 percent.

Government Payments, average per farm receiving payments

\$5,803 in 2002, \$4,606 in 1997, up 26 percent.

Source: USDA NASS

Public Opinion About Agriculture

Community Survey

See comments in Steering Committee Recommendations in the Appendix.

Comments from Public Workshop

See comments in Steering Committee Recommendations in the Appendix.

Desired Future Condition, Policies and Action Items

Desired Future Condition

Recognizing that agriculture is important to Delta's heritage, economy, agro-tourism and rural character, agriculture is preserved and enhanced through creative ways to maintain working farms.

Policies and Action Items

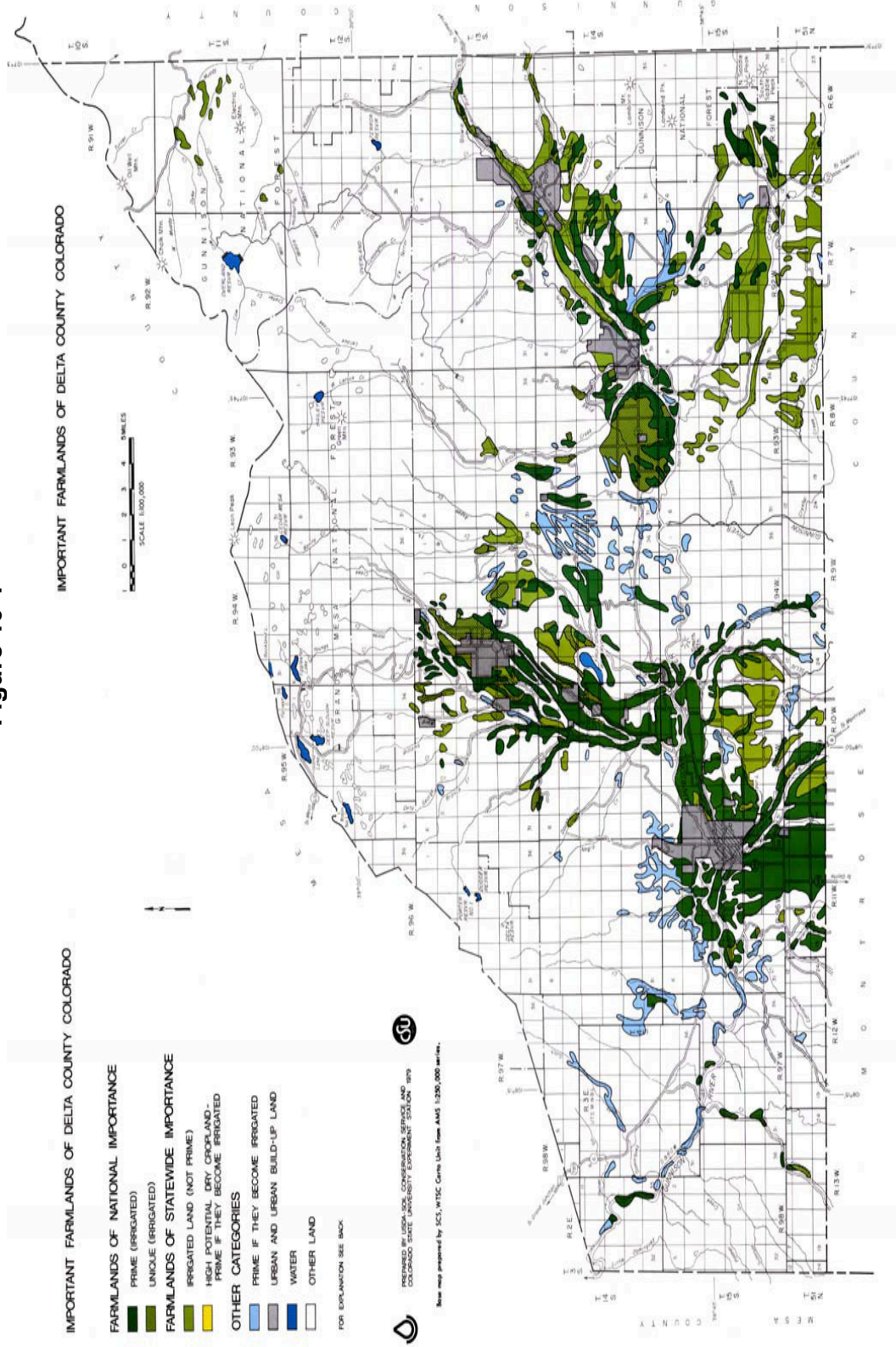
Policy 1 – Encourage the long-range protection of agriculture in and near Delta.
Action items to implement this policy include:

1. Continue and expand opportunities for community farmers markets.
2. Create incentives to encourage U-Pick agriculture, particularly on small “hobby farm” parcels.
3. Coordinate with farmers and the Land Trust to encourage farmers to voluntarily place conservation easements on agricultural land.
4. Continue to support agri-business in Delta (e.g. egg farm, grain elevators, etc.)

Delta Comprehensive Plan 1997

Section Three: Open Space Preservation	Status C=completed, I=incomplete, P=in progress)
Goals	
Conserve open space or vacant land in around the City which will contribute to the preservation of our rural character, enhance the livability of our community, and provide recreational opportunism for our residents and visitors	P
Guidelines	
Encourage the use of tax incentives, gifts, federal and state recreation and conservation funds, easements, and innovative agreements with landowners (transfer of development rights), and other possibilities to implement the City's open space and master plan	P
Actions	
Develop an open space master plan which creates a process for evaluating potential open space parcels, identifying and prioritizing acquisitions, and developing a financing plan to obtain desirable open space	C
Investigate the creation of a readily available and expandable open space fund which can be used to take advantage of immediate and unexpected opportunities to buy land	C
Collaborate with land preservation agencies and organizations to receive financial and technical assistance for open space projects (an example would be the Trust for Public Land)	ICP
Investigate the application of impact fees for open space preservation	C

Figure 10-1



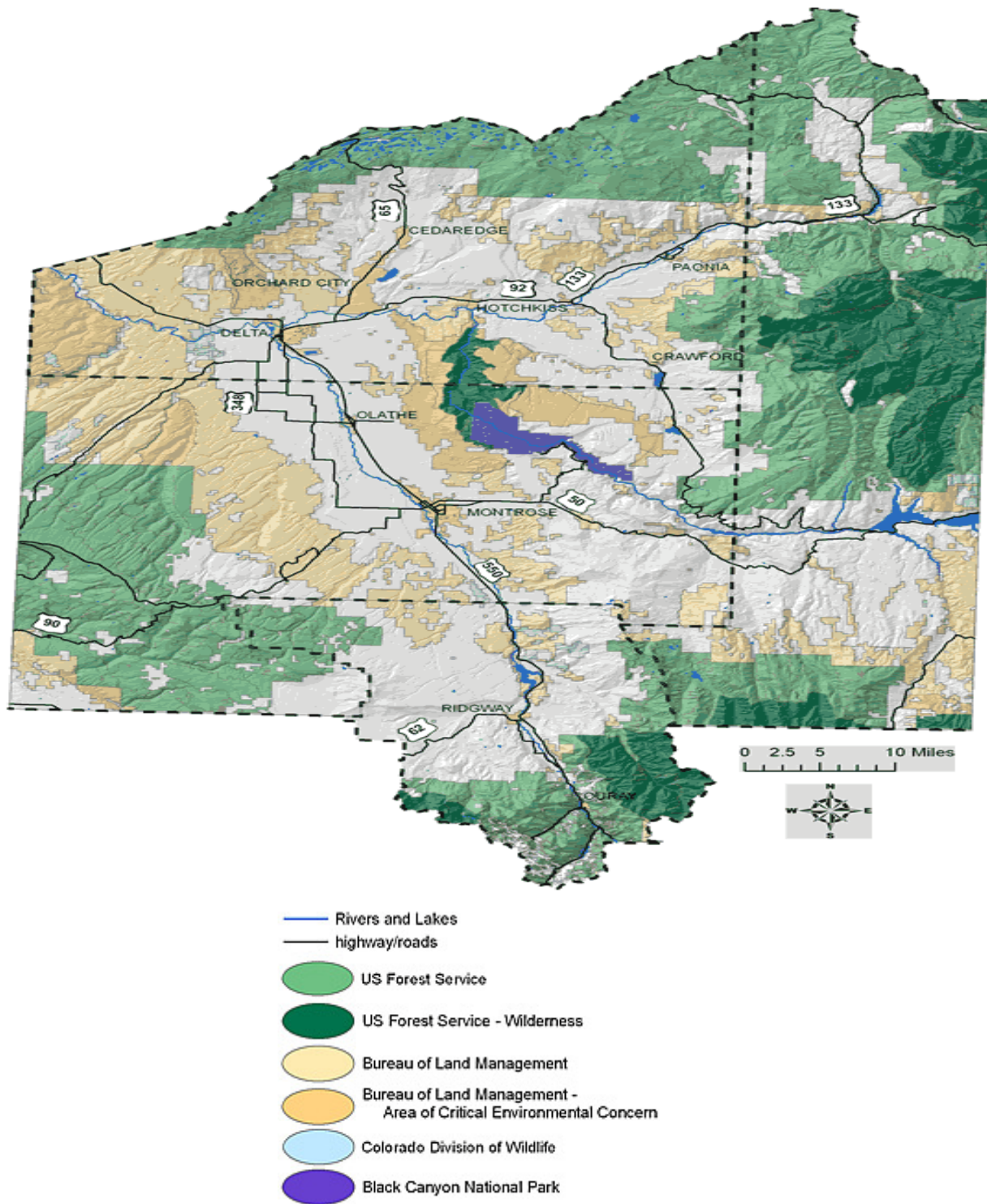


Figure 10-2

Source: Black Canyon Land Trust